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SUBJECT: TURKEY AND THE EU: HOPES AND ASPIRATIONS, BUT
LINGERING SENSITIVITIES

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1. (SBU) Summary: Sessions at last week's Istanbul conference of Europe's Green Party highlighted Turkey's hopes and aspirations to gain a date for the beginning of accession negotiations, but also lingering sensitivities about perceived EU discrimination against Turkey and local discomfort about the changes EU negotiations and membership will bring in its wake. The centerpiece of the conference was a joint appearance by German Foreign Minister Fischer, Turkish Foreign Minister Gul and incoming Enlargement Commissioner Rehn, where the two sides laid out their positions, with Gul pressing for easing of the negotiating conditions and Fischer arguing that they represented a sensible middle ground that enables both sides to keep their "eye on the goal." More heated and revealing was a debate on Islam (which included an Alevi representative) and a philosophical discussion on Turkey's EU prospects that featured noted novelists Yasar Kemal and Orhan Pamuk, and singer (and opposition deputy) Zulfi Livaneli. Environmental and human rights panels also attracted extensive interest. End Summary.

2. (SBU) The October 19-21 Istanbul meeting of the European Parliament's Green/EFA Group was designed to facilitate an "open and constructive" discussion about EU and Turkish mutual expectations. With participation from a broad cross-section of representatives from the Turkish political world and civil society, the conference exposed a number of the fault lines both between the two sides and within Turkey itself. Designed as a pluralist forum, with representation by all viewpoints, it quickly encountered criticism from some for failing to include an adequate "Kemalist" representation. Opposition gadfly Bedri Kadri charged that the inclusion of only like-minded "second republicans" and "liberal-Islamists" shortchanged the Kemalists, which he optimistically (over)estimated as 60-70 percent of Turkish "intellectuals."

3. (SBU) Equal Treatment: On whether Turkey is being treated differently, Green representatives were unapologetic. Group President Daniel Cohn-Bendit argued that Turkey should actively seek "special" rather than "equal" treatment, since its integration is not comparable to that of such countries as Malta and Bulgaria. "It will be difficult (for both)," he argued, "but one of the most important steps we must both take." While FM Gul echoed the government's standard insistence on equality of treatment, Prime Minister Erdogan's close advisor Cuneyt Zapsu picked up on Bendit's suggestion. "We are not being treated like others, because we are different," he argued, and "I am proud" of that fact. Given Turkey's size and importance, he continued, "It is naive to expect equal treatment."

4. (SBU) A Balancing Act: Both Commissioner Rehn and FM Fischer emphasized that the Commission recommendation sets an "end goal of full membership," adding that the special conditions imposed were not in any sense "harsh and punitive," but rather intended to "recognize the difficulties" in Turkey's accession. It is not against Turkey or a sign of skepticism, Fischer insisted, but a "work of art" designed to open the road and give Europe time to modernize its structures and prepare itself for Turkish accession. In the future, Fischer optimistically predicted, "People will change and laugh that they once wanted to say no to Turkey." For his part, however, FM Gul did not back down from Turkey's desire to see changes from the Commission's report, arguing that mutual trust must be deepened and consolidated and that Turkey's membership should not be a "subject of internal politics (in European countries)."

5. (SBU) Historical Taboos: While the ministers reiterated basic positions, others directly broached local taboos and held up a mirror to challenge the EU to look more closely at itself. Noted writer Orhan Pamuk, in particular, hit a chord with some in the audience (and antagonized others) by stressing that the new and freer Turkey must now face up to questions about its past, particularly the "disappearance" of Armenians and Greeks in the early part of the last century, arguing that a culture where such issues can be discussed will be one that Europe will find easier to accept. Singer/writer/director (and Republican People's Party-- the party of Ataturk-- deputy) Zulfu Livaneli challenged the

notion of Ataturk's supremacy by noting the contributions of a long line of reformers who preceded him. EU Parliamentarian Cem Ozdemir even suggested that Ataturk must be saved from some of his admirers who sought to use him as an "excuse to stop freedom." "Where," he asked rhetorically, "is the modernization of Turkish education?"

16. (SBU) Religion and Identity: In a panel on Islam, after criticizing the Turkish state for discriminating against, and even refusing to recognize, Alevis as a separate religious group (note: Alevis are heterodox Muslims who account for as much as 20 percent of the Turkish population), Alevi representative Esat Korkmaz surprised some by remarking that outright abolition of the Religious Affairs Directorate (Diyanet) would be dangerous. Turkish journalist Rusen Cakir reminded the Europeans that Turkey is not monolithically religious and conservative, noting, for example, that it was not only the EU that opposed Turkey's recent effort to criminalize adultery, but also many in Turkey vocally opposed the effort as well. On the question of borders, after one Euro MP voiced concerns that expansion to include Turkey might prove to be a "Trojan Horse designed to weaken Europe," Galatasaray University professor Ahmet Insel retorted that much of the ongoing debate is "not about Turkey and the EU's borders at all, but European identity and the EU's future." Turkish identity was also a recurring theme. Zulfu Livaneli remarked, "I felt European until I went to Europe for the first time," and stressed that Turks are the most Eastern of the Western societies and want to play that role.

17. (SBU) Comment: The Istanbul Green Party Conference provided a useful opportunity for European politicians to come together with their Turkish counterparts and with elements of Turkey's civil society. It showcased not just the hopes and fears that accompany the accession project, but also the impact that process has had on Turkey, leaving panelists free to advance arguments that a short decade ago would have led to their arrest and imprisonment. Given the delicacy with which local taboos were broached and the vociferous response generated, however, it is clear that Turkey remains in the early stages of grappling with issues of history and identity. As for the Europeans, Nuray Mert, columnist for the daily Radikal, questioned whether coming to Turkey and debating, while also "acting as if Ramazan was not going on," really creates a bridge to the Muslim world. In addition, instead of simply viewing Turkey as the sweetener in a cup of coffee, changing the taste but not the appearance, she argued, Europeans need to be willing to accept it as the creamer instead, affecting both at the same time. Only such an approach, she suggested, will permit a true partnership between the two sides. End Comment.
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